

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH PAPER: Emily Dickinson's Backyard Birds and Bugs

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Emily Dickinson scholars have noted the importance of symbolism and imagery in her poetry, of which Emily Miller Budick's *Emily Dickinson and the Life of Language: a Study in Symbolic Poetics* (1985), John Cody's *After Great Pain: The Inner Life of Emily Dickinson* (1971), Thomas W. Ford's *Heaven Beguiles the Tired: Death in the Poetry of Emily Dickinson* (1966) and Clark Griffith's *The Long Shadow: Emily Dickinson's Tragic Poetry* (1964) stand out. Although their contribution to Dickinson's scholarship is great, they seem to pay little attention or fail to appreciate Dickinson's imagery and symbolism of birds and insects in her poetry.

In this paper, I argue that avian and insectile creatures in Dickinson's poetry are not mentioned purposelessly or randomly. Birds and insects are employed to express larger aspects of artistic creativity that go beyond the physical, musical, or habitual dimensions these creatures are normally associated with. It is through grasping the symbolism that a bird or an insect stands for that readers of her poetry can come closer to the intended meaning of the poems and therefore better appreciate and enjoy her poetry.

By offering close readings of a collection of her poems, as well as presenting evidence from her letters and her biography, I will explore the imagery and symbolism in Dickinson's poetry. As the symbolism of birds and bugs in Dickinson's poetry is underexplored, this study attempts to fill a gap in the Dickinson scholarship given the fact that her poetry is replete with birds and insects.